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Gender Relations - Power, Knowledge and social Change

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Gender Relations – Power, Knowledge and Social Change

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FREIA's paper series contains working papers, papers for conferences and seminars, project descriptions, lecture manuscripts, chapters from books etc. The papers are made by researchers affiliated to FREIA or by researchers who have visited the centre. The paper series aims at spreading the knowledge of FREIA's activities, internally as well as externally. Editors of the series are Ann-Dorte Christensen and Ruth Emerek. The papers can be ordered at Aalborg University, Department of Development and Planning, phone: +45 98 158522, ext. 2452.

Gender Relations – Power, Knowledge and Social Change

Preface

'Gender Relations - Power, Knowledge and Social Change' is the fourth research programme from FREIA, the Feminist Research Centre in Aalborg, since 1984. The feminist research programme at Aalborg University was founded in 1976 and is almost as old as the university itself. On May, 1990, FREIA was formally established.

The first report from FREIA 'Feminist Research, Aalborg University 1976-1991' (FREIAs Paper Series no.2, 1992) told the history of the development of feminist research at Aalborg University and gave a description of the previous research programme *'Gender, Power and Identity in a Developmental Perspective'*. The new research programme is a continuation and deepening of the former research questions, with a special emphasis on metatheoretical and epistemological questions connected with the construction of gender and science. This report contains a short description of the main research questions and guiding hypothesis of the present programme, presents its three main research themes, international networks and individual research projects.

FREIA is an interdisciplinary research centre which is comprised of anthropologists, cultural sociologists, economists, historians, political scientists, sociologists, statisticians. FREIA is situated in the Department of Development and Planning at Aalborg University.

Members of FREIA:

Department of Development and Planning

- Bodil Bjerring, Senior Researcher,
- Ann-Dorte Christensen, Associate Professor, Ph.D.
- Jeanette Dahl, Research Assistant
- Ruth Emerek, Associate Professor
- Vibeke Jacobsen, Research Assistant
- Mona Larsen, Research Assistant
- Anna-Birte Ravn, Associate Professor,
- Iris Rittenhofer, Ph.D. student
- Birte Siim, Associate Professor
- Susanne Thorbek, Associate Professor, Dr.phil.
- Anne Showstack Sassoon, Guest Professor (1996-1997)

Department of Social Science and Organization

- Catharina Juul Kristensen, Ph.D. student.

The report has been written and edited by Birte Siim and Susanne Thorbek on the basis of contributions from members of FREIA and the setting and lay-out was done by Ellen Nyrup Pedersen.

Introduction

FREIA's research programme 'Gender, Power and Identity in a Developmental Perspective' has during the last three years (1993-1996) been an umbrella programme for three general research themes focusing on gender relations and their interplay with the state, the labour market, and civil society. The previous research programme was organized around three sub-themes:

- Gender Division of Work, Power and Identity
- Gender, Power and Democracy
- Gender, Power and Identity in the Third World

The themes have been analysed both from a historical and a comparative perspective and they have been connected by common research questions related to analysing the interplay between civil society, the state/politics and the market.

During the last 10 years FREIA's researchers have gradually developed research projects, competences and qualifications in relation to these areas, and the three themes are at the centre of FREIA's Ph.D. programme 'Gender Relations - State, Market and Civil Society', and part of the national Ph.D. programme 'Meanings of Gender in an Interdisciplinary Perspective'.

A number of researchers with individual research projects have been connected to each of the research themes, and one important objective has been to develop theories, concepts and models to understand the interplay between gender relations in the three areas: market, state and civil society. During the last year, 1995/1996, FREIA has given priority to the task of developing the research programme through activities aimed at creating new understandings and new links between the three themes through seminars, books and guest professors.

The new research programme 'Gender Relations - Power, Knowledge and Social Change' is a continuation and deepening of the old research questions. However, during the next three years there will be a new emphasis on metatheoretical and epistemological questions. As a consequence, fundamental problems connected with the construction of gender and science will be the centre of FREIAs new research profile.

The present research programme is an umbrella for a number of research projects organized around the following sub-themes:

- Gender, Work and Social Change
- Gender, Politics and Social Change
- Gender in a Global Context

The common objective is to qualify our knowledge of the three areas and to develop theoretical approaches and research strategies that facilitates the understanding of the dynamics of social change by analysing the interrelation between key categories such as gender, class, ethnicity and age.

The main research questions and guiding hypothesis

Today feminist perspectives have to some extent become part of many areas of the social sciences. At the same time there is an awareness that there is not only one feminist perspective in social science but several competing feminisms that may often represent different research strategies.

On the epistemological level, FREIA has been inspired by poststructuralist reflections of power and knowledge. It is an underlying assumption behind the different research projects that all knowledge is an expression of power relations and that the gender dimension is one of the crucial power relations in society. The objective of the research programme is to rethink existing theories and to develop a more dynamic understanding of the relation between gender, class, ethnicity and race. This research agenda involves employing different approaches, research designs and research strategies, and combining situated knowledge with theories of deconstruction and discourse analysis in new ways.

One of the guiding hypotheses of the research programme of FREIA is that gender is one of the basic structuring categories in modern societies. Furthermore, gender is an integrated part of the theories, concepts and models we use to describe and understand this world. One objective of the programme is, therefore, to study the implicit understandings of gender in the dominant scientific discourses. One of the basic research questions is, how gender is constructed in the theoretical frameworks, including the different feminist theories.

Another assumption behind the programme is that gender, gender relations and gender systems are dynamic categories constantly negotiated and changed in everyday life, often in contradictions to the general definitions in society at large. The common objective is to study the interplay between gender, class, race and ethnicity, and between gender and generation, in different policy contexts. The perspective is to develop a feminist framework that can analyse social change by integrating the perspective of human beings/actors, structures and institutions.

The common objective of the present research programme is to *rethink* the dominant scientific categories and to *reconstruct* the understanding of the unequal power relations between women and men, and between women, in society. The normative ideal is a society where differences no longer create inequality between women and men, races and classes, and indeed where difference is no longer identified with inequality, exclusion and oppression.

The fundamental research question is: How does politics in the broadest sense construct gender, and gender construct politics? This question can be divided into three main aspects:

1. At the epistemological level we ask: How do notions of gender influence, or even determine, theories, models and ways of creating knowledge in different disciplines and frameworks, and how do theories and accepted ways of creating knowledge influence notions of gender?
2. On the theoretical level we ask: How are the categories women and men, masculinity and femininity created, maintained and changed in different societies and in different times and places? What are the different models of gender organization in modern societies? How did they develop over time? And what is the meaning of gender in post-industrial and post-colonial societies? How are the processes that create gender related to general processes of inequality and difference in society? How can we theorize the category gender, and gender relations, and understand their meaning for women and men and their effects on the way society is organized and develops?
3. In relation to social continuity and change we ask: How do people understand, create and negotiate gender relations in their daily lives. What is the interplay between their understandings and society at large? What is the interplay between the notion of gender in society at large and notions of other differences? How can the processes of inequality be changed? What is the institutional and structural potentials and barriers for women, and other social groups, to change the unequal power relations in society?

The general research questions about how gender relations are constructed, reproduced and changed will be analysed through new research projects within three main research areas. The different research projects are connected through a common research interest to analyse gender, power and knowledge from a perspective of social change.

Theoretical Inspirations - The feminist dialogue with poststructuralism

FREIA is an interdisciplinary research centre that has been inspired by different theoretical paradigms, and the post-structural approach is one of them. Poststructuralism has given inspiration to an important feminist dialogue about gender, power and knowledge (Harding 1986, Scott 1988, Fraser 1989, Nicolson ed. 1990, Benhabib 1992). Feminist research has made an important contribution to the critique of universalist and essentialist tendencies in the Enlightenment thinking as well as of the use of hierarchical dichotomies in social science. In addition, women of color and women working from a third world perspective have criticized the main tendency in feminist thought for not challenging the ethnocentric and androcentric premises of mainstream science. They have argued that feminist thought has been blind to power/knowledge relations based on class, race and ethnicity.

The discourse of poststructuralism has for instance been concerned with the relation between the concept of *equality* and the concept of *difference* which has also played an important role in the feminist discourse. The concept of difference in European/American thought is one example of ethnocentrism. Difference has been conceived as equivalent to being unequal and this has in practice led to unequal treatment and conditions for people who are different from the white norm.

Feminists influenced by poststructuralist thinking have shown that there is an important analytical distinction between the categories: equal - unequal and difference - similarity/sameness (Harding 1986, Scott 1988). The point being that it is only from the perspective of the dominant male discourse that 'difference' can be used to legitimize the social, economic and political exclusion of women, the poor and people of color. From the point of view of the 'oppressed' groups differences can, however, be seen as resources. Pateman (1988) has shown how social and political theory is penetrated by the belief in a sexual contract based on the male norm and the oppression of women that has become a necessary precondition for the social contracts in Western societies. Today there is an open and stimulating debate about key concepts in feminist thought and there is no longer one or two dominant feminist paradigms but many competing feminisms. One example is the debate about the relation between the concepts sex and

gender. The feminist argument for the concept of gender was a conscious emphasis of the social construction of men and women in opposition to the old concept of (biological) sex. Recently some feminists have argued that the concept of gender does not solve the problems, because it suppresses the material basis in the bodies and accepts the male norm. Other feminists influenced by postmodernism have advocated a radical constructionism where the body and the way it is perceived is seen as a social construction.

Feminist scholars are engaged in developing analyses that acknowledge the interplay between science and power and the dynamic between the theoretical categories of gender, class, race and ethnicity (Nicolson ed. 1990). The different (feminist) attempts to deal with the challenges to universalist thinking can be summarized into four positions or approaches that represent different, often overlapping, research strategies.

Positioning research; situated knowledge:

This approach is combined with a research strategy that takes into consideration the position of the researcher and aims to make visible the open and hidden assumptions behind research projects and the research processes, including analyses about the specific organization, practices and financing of research. The strength of this strategy is the focus on the importance of power relations as well as on the social conditions and the experiences of the researcher for the outcome of research as well as a 'strong objectivity' (Harding 1986).

'Embedded' knowledge:

This approach has been influential among feminist scholars in history, anthropology and sociology. This is a research strategy 'from below' that aims at developing theory on the basis of 'thick descriptions' of the social practices of the daily lives of women, and creates a dialogue between holistic smaller studies and theory. The strength of this approach has been a positive research strategy that takes seriously the perspectives of the people involved, and contributes to new theory formulations as well as grounded problematizations of established theories.

Deconstruction

This approach was developed as a critical perspective of existing theories and categories, especially the category of the 'subject', 'identity' and of 'objective knowledge'. Deconstruction is inspired by Derrida and has influenced feminists working in literature and philosophy. It focuses on the hidden meaning of words, concepts, texts that comprises a whole range of critical readings of texts and social practice, conceived as texts, spanning from authors play with words and total relativism to more political and positioned readings. The strength of this approach is the often radical critique of established 'truths' and new meanings created by juxtapositioning of texts. However, many feminists claim that the emphasis on language makes it difficult to relate the texts to social, cultural and political institutions and practices.

Contextualization of social and political systems:

This approach has been influential on feminists working in sociology, political science and history. The objective is to contextualize universal categories by empirical analyses that focus on variations in gender relations and gender systems in time and space. The aim is to develop dynamic understanding of social change that analyses the interaction between social actors, institutions and structure. The strength is the synthesising perspective that aims to analyse the interplay between gender relations in different arenas of society, like the civil society/the family, the state and the market, and in different policy contexts.

FREIA has been inspired by the four different approaches to the study of gender relations and interpretes them as complementary and overlapping strategies that need to be combined in different ways within the various research areas.

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- Pateman, Carole (1988): *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford University Press.
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Research Themes

I. Gender, Work and Social Change

Work is a central factor in the lives of women and men - and for the organization and development of society. Within the theme of Gender, Work and Social Change researchers from the disciplines of anthropology, economics, history and statistics focus on the following main questions:

- Which *knowledge* of gender influences scientific concepts, models and theories of work and social change?
- How is this knowledge of gender related to the *power* of different social groups?
- How does it influence popular discourses and political strategies?
- And what are the consequences of this for women and for the development of society?

The aim is to develop concepts, models and theories of work and social change which:

- include gender as a central category without perpetuating dualistic gender concepts,
- facilitate analyses of power structures involved in gender relations as well as in relations of class, ethnicity and age,
- and which can be supportive for political discourses and strategies aiming at gender equality in the labour market and the family and at a society where differences between genders, classes, generation and ethnic background do not involve inequality.

More specific problems concerning Gender, Work and Social Change analysed in the different research projects are:

- Recent trends in the gender division of work in the labour market and the family. Connexions between women's and men's public and private work in different classes, ethnic and generations. Future trends in the demand for labour and mechanisms of labour market marginalization and integration.
- The effect of current national and international policies, e.g. educational and regional development policies, on the employment of women and men of different classes, ethnic and age groups. Possibilities of changing public policies.

- Historical constructions of gender. How do culturally changing perceptions of women and men, of female and male, construct gendered individuals and inform popular discourses and political strategies on work and social change? How do these perceptions of gender affect changing horizontal and vertical gender divisions of work? And the development of society at large?

The theme Gender, Work and Social Change includes the following research projects:

Bodil Bjerring (anthropology):

- 'Gender as a Human Resource in the Danish Labour Market.' (Financed by The Danish Social Science Research Council 1996-2001).
- 'Evaluation of EU Pilot Project: The Long-Term Unemployed and New Jobs' (The Danish case. Financed by The European Commission 1996-97).

Bodil Bjerring (anthropology) & *Ruth Emerek* (statistics):

- 'Work and Flexibility in Time and Space' (With Sanne Ipsen, Centre for alternative Social Analysis, Copenhagen)

Jeanette Dahl & Vibeke Jakobsen (economics) & *Ruth Emerek* (statistics):

- 'Trends in the Development of Labour Market Positions of Migrant and Refugee Groups.' (Financed by The Danish Ministry of Labour and The Employment Council, County of Northern Jutland 1994-1997).

Reports from the project (all published in 1997):

1. 'Indvandrere og Flygtninge' ('Migrants and refugees' - a discussion of definitions and operationalisations of migrants and refugees and the consequences for the picture of their labour market participation)
2. 'Indvandrere og deres Efterkommere på det Danske Arbejdsmarked' (Migrants and their descendants at the Danish Labour Market - an investigation of occupations and unemployment in 1991)
3. 'Marginalisering og Integration på Arbejdsmarkedet' (Marginalisation and Integration at the Labour Market - a longitudinal analysis of migrants and their descendants participation on the labour market in the period 1980-1993)

4. 'Indvandrere og deres Efterkommere på det Nordjyske Arbejdsmarked' (Migrants and their descendants at the Labour Market in Northern Jutland - a longitudinal analysis of the labour market participation in Northern Jutland)

Ruth Emerek (statistics):

- 'Gender Division of Work: Barriers and Resources in the Four Generation Society - a longitudinal analysis of labour market participation'

Mona Larsen, Jeanette Dahl & Vibeke Jakobsen (economics):

- 'The Future Labour Market in Northern Jutland.' (In cooperation with Flemming Ibsen, Jørgen Stamhus og Jesper Zeth, CARMA: Centre of Labour Market Studies, Aalborg University. Financed by The Employment Council, County of Northern Jutland 1994-1997).

Anna-Birte Ravn (history):

- 'Gender Division of Work and Historical Change.'

Iris Rittenhofer (history):

- 'Media Pictures of Danish and German Female Business Managers 1960-90: A Historical Comparative Analysis in a Gender Perspective.' (Research Scholarship, Aalborg University).
- 'The Gender of Research in Professions and Media.' (Financed by The Danish Social Science Research Council 1998-99).

Networks:

- Danish Network on Women, Gender and the Labour Market
- EFS-Network: Gender Inequality and the European Regions
- Gender and Social Exclusion: European Labour Markets in Comparative Perspective
- Nordic Women's Historians' Meetings
- Women's Wages Work and Protective Labour Legislation in Comparative Perspective (1989-95)
- Nordic Network on Women in Economic and Social History (1995-).

II. Gender, Politics and Social Change

In modern society politics in a broad sense is an activity in all arenas where human beings are engaged in the production and reproduction of their lives. It involves both conflict and co-operation about collective decision-making, and the values and perspectives that underlies it. In modern democracies there has been a double development: First, women have gained access to political institutions, and second the study of politics has increasingly been connected with problems in everyday life. Within the theme Gender, Politics and Social change researchers from the disciplines of political science and sociology focus on the following key questions:

- Which knowledge, ideas and perceptions about gender influence scientific concepts, models and theories of politics and of political and social change?
- How is this knowledge constructed, and how is it related to the power of different social groups?
- How does it influence popular discourses and political strategies?
- What are the consequences for women and for the development of society?

The aim is to develop concepts, models and theories of politics and social changes which:

- include gender as a central category without perpetuating dualistic gender concepts,
- facilitate analyses of power structures involved in gender relations as well as class, ethnicity and age, and
- facilitate analyses which can be supportive for political discourses and strategies aiming at gender equality in politics and society where differences according to gender, class, and ethnicity do not involve inequality.

More specific problems concerning Gender, Politics and Social Change analysed in the different research projects are:

- Comparative analyses of women's social and political citizenship. What is the perception of gender relations in different systems of welfare and what has been the consequences for women's equality? What has been the political role of women in influencing the different European welfare states?

- The political mobilization of women in the Scandinavian countries. What has been the characteristics of the political mobilization of women and what has been the effect on politics and women's lives?
- Gender, democracy and welfare states in transition. During the last 30 years women have been empowered in their daily life and have gained access to political institutions. What difference do women make in politics? What are the consequences of the deep-going social and political changes for gender relations and democracy?
- Gender, modernity and everyday life. How does structural changes in late modernity affect everyday life of young adults? What are the gender differences in the way young people cope with new problems of uncertainty and new choices in everyday life?

The theme Gender, Politics and Social Change includes the following research projects:

Ann-Dorte Christensen (political sociology):

- 'The political mobilization of women in the Scandinavian countries' (Halva Makten. A comparative research project under the Nordic Council).

Catharina Juul Kristensen (sociology):

- 'Urban lives. Younger Danish adults Stories of their Everyday Life'. A qualitative study of how the generation born in the 1960s handle their everyday life in late modernity.
(Research scholarship, Aalborg University)

Birte Siim (political science):

- 'Gender and Citizenship: Social Integration and Social Exclusion of women in the European welfare states' (Thematic Network under the Targeted Socio-economic Research Programme (TSER), financed by The European Commission 1996-1999).
- 'Gender, Power and Democracy - the Interplay between social and political Citizenship' (Financed by the Danish Research Council for the Social Sciences 1994-95).

Ann-Dorte Christensen & Birte Siim:

- 'Gender, Welfare States and Democracy - in Transition' (collective research programme with participants from four Danish Universities coordinated by Aalborg University, financed by the Danish Research Council for the Social Sciences 1996-2000).

Anne Showstack Sassoon:

- 'Theoretical Implications of Women's Changing Socio-Economic Roles'.

Networks:

- European Network on Research and Theory on Gender, Welfare State and Citizenship. Coordinator: *Trudie Knijn*, Utrecht University.
- GEDISST, Groupe d'Etudes sur la Division Sociale et Sexuelle du Travail, CNRS, Paris. Coordinator: *Jacqueline Heinen*.
- 'Gender and European Welfare Regimes', EC project under the Human Capital and Mobility Programme (1993-96). Coordinator: *Jane Lewis*, London School of Economic and Politics.
- 'Halva Makten - Nordiske kvinnors väg till demokrati och jämställdhet' (1995-98). Coordinator: *Viveca Ramstedt-Silén* Svenska Social- och Kommunalhögskolan, Helsingfors. *Ann-Dorte Christensen*, medlem af redaktionskomiteen.
- 'L'Etat et Rapports sociaux de Sexe', Coordinator *Jacqueline Heinen*, C.S.P.R.P., Université Paris VII, Denis Diderot.
- 'Social Integration and Social Exclusion in European Welfare States', Thematic Network under EC's 4. Framework Programme: Targeted Socio-Economic Research (TSER) 1996-1999.

Coordinator: *Birte Siim*, (AAU) in cooperation with *Jane Lewis* (LSE) and *Ilona Ostner* (Georg August University, Göttingen), *Trudie Knijn* (Utrecht University), *Chiara Saraceno*, (Turino University), *Barbara Hobson*, (Stockholm University), *Jacqueline Heinen*, (Université, Paris VII), *Mary Daly*, (Georg August University), *Liisa Rentalaaho* (Tampere University), *Arnlaug Leira*, (Institut for Samfunnsforskning, Oslo) and *Bérengere Marques-Pereira*, (Université Libre, Bruxelles).

III. Gender in a Global Context

Global connections are becoming closer and today not just money and goods but people and culture are moving across borders. Gender relations are deeply influenced by globalization and they themselves have an impact on the process. The theme Gender in a Global Context focuses on one project in cooperation with the Centre for Development and International Relations (DIR).

The purpose of the project is to study the development of Bangkok seen in a global context with special emphasis on;

- The impact of social movements with a basis in the slum-settlements on
 - political/administrative reforms and public debate
 - in the local communities
 - on the development of identities, especially gender-identity.
- The impact of gender-relations and changes in these on
 - the growth of Bangkok
 - social movements
 - the formation of identity.
- A comparative View on other Asian Cities (Bombay, Hanoi, Kuala Lumpur) their growth, social movements and gender-identity.
- To educate/train a Ph.D. student.

The theme Gender in a Global Context' includes the following research projects:

Susanne Thorbek (cultural sociology): Growth of Cities, Social Movements and Women - A Case Study of Bangkok with a Comparative View of other Asian Cities.

Networks:

- Gender, class, race/ethnicity, power and knowledge in a period with increasing globalization and urbanization. Nordic Network. Last activity: work-shop: 'Gender in a Global context', Aalborg University, 1995.
- Women and Housing, International Network now situated in the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala.
- The network involved in ENRECA application from Research Center on Development and International Relations (DIR), Aalborg University, main cooperator in Asia, Hanoi University
- Women in the third world. Loose network situated in Copenhagen.

Publications from conferences, seminars, work-shops:

Issues of Methodology and Epistemology in Postcolonial Studies, ed S. Arnfred, Occasional Papers, International Development Studies, RUC 1995

Gender in a Global Context, ed S. Thorbek, FREIAs skriftserie no. 28-32, Aalborg University, 1996

A Place to Live, ed. A. Schlyter, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 1996.

Gender, Urbanization and Environment Research and Policy Agenda, ed. D. Lee Schmidt, Mazingira Institute, Nairobi 1994.

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- Christensen, Ann-Dorte og Poul Knopp Damkjær (1996): 'Women and Political Representation in Denmark' in: Beate Hoecker (ed.) *Infant Democracies. Women and Political Participation and Representation in the States of European Union*.
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- Christensen, Ann-Dorte (1995): *The Young Citizens - Towards a New Gender Gap in Modern Democracy?* Paper presented at 2nd European Conference of Sociology, Budapest, (32 pages).
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